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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT PLS PASS USTR; DEPT PLS PASS USAID

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TAGS: ETRD SENV ECON CO KLAB FTA

SUBJECT: USG PARTICIPATION IN THE FIRST ROUND OF US-ANDEAN

FTA TALKS

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¶1. (U) To addressees from Ambassador William B. Wood.

¶2. (SBU) Colombia's Minister of Commerce and the GOC's lead FTA negotiator have approached post to request that the USG send as complete a delegation as possible to the upcoming FTA talks in Bogota, May 18-19. Both officials stressed the political significance that a full U.S. delegation to the talks would represent for Colombian stakeholders, especially those skeptical of U.S. intentions to negotiate in good faith.

¶3. (SBU) While post recognizes that this round is envisioned as having a high organizational content, a sizeable USG delegation, with strong representation of the agencies directly involved, would have important positive political repercussions in Colombia. According to lead Colombian negotiator Amb. Hernando Jose Gomez, one of the most popular arguments against an FTA is that its terms are imposed by the US. A US del that was missing key players would strengthen that view, undermining the support the agreement currently enjoys (polls show that 60 percent of Colombians approve of the agreement). Gomez's arguments have been echoed in Embassy contact with leading private sector and Congressional groups in Colombia. Both Trade Minister Botero and Vice Minister Ortega have also asked that the USG have a delegation with representatives of the relevant agencies and bureaus for the same reasons.

¶4. (SBU) With the talks in Bogota, security concerns can be minimized. The talks will be at a large convention center and hotel with excellent facilities and robust security. Post is able to provide transport for as large a delegation as the USG can field. Post recognizes the fiscal constraints faced by some agencies, but we note the tone of the negotiations will inevitably be affected by the discussion at this round. As negotiations move forward, and the shape of the agreement becomes clearer, those who will face troubles will mount a strong offensive against the agreement. Their efforts will undoubtedly be helped by any negative impressions of the first round.

¶5. (SBU) Post urges that all USG agencies (and Department of State offices/bureaus) with an interest in the FTA, including trade capacity building issues, make an effort to field a substantial presence for the May round.

WOOD